**Blinkers on NAM**

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**Introduction**

The North American Model for Wildlife Conservation, or more simply known as NAM, is the defining structure for wildlife conservation throughout the United States and Canada. This paper, however, will focus on the United State’s creation and subsequent impact of the model, not Canada’s. NAM has been an incredibly powerful tool in conserving wildlife for the past hundred years, especially in consideration of favorable game species. While it has a huge range in its capabilities in wildlife conservation, it also has its own limitations. This paper will discuss the various “blinkers” on NAM in which the model misses the mark on or may simply leave out entirely. The three main topics will be the complete lack of consideration for indigenous peoples and their cultures, the non-hunting aspect of wildlife conservation, and the ecological tunnel vision that can create serious problems for the many ecosystems across North America.

**Background**

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, or NAM, came about during the late eighteenth century after a long period of heavy overexploitation of the American wilderness (Mahoney and Jackson III 2013). Species that are now common, like the white tail deer, nearly went extinct due to the massive market for game meat and hide. Species like bison were hunted to near extinction as well, not only for their massive amounts of meat and hide, but also as a targeted attack on the various indigenous tribes that utilized bison as their primary food source. Species like the passenger pigeon that were once unimaginably abundant have since completely gone extinct, having been exploited far beyond their ability to persevere. When the wholesale slaughter of North American wildlife grew too much for the American people, NAM was born. The premise of NAM is based on a history of adapted colonial laws from British common law, and looking even further back from the various Roman laws that dictated wildlife use. In total, seven principles were created (Mahoney and Jackson III 2013):

1. Wildlife is to be a public trust
2. Wildlife product markets are banned
3. Wildlife is allocated equally by law
4. Wildlife use must be for legitimate purposes
5. Hunting is available to all
6. Wildlife is an international resource
7. Science is the foundation for conservation policy

At first glance these tenets seem to be well rounded and reasonable, and for the most part, they are. Over the history of NAM, however, there are some areas in which the seven principles do not cover well or at all.

**Point 1: Indigenous Peoples**

The first example of NAM’s lack of cover is probably the most apparent. The mistreatment of the various indigenous tribes of America has always been prevalent. As stated above, the near extinction of the bison across the united states was due in large part to the attempted eradication of the Native American peoples. A history of broken promises and betrayal laid the groundwork for the country, and still continues to this day. When looking at the title “North American Model of Wildlife Conservation,” it is interesting to note that the “North American” simply means that it is intended to be used in North America, not that it is rooted in North American ideology. NAM is based on European colonialism, not on the perspectives of the many indigenous tribes that covered North America for centuries. The idea of indigenizing NAM is something that has been a question for years. The Haudenosaunee Environmental Protection Process (HEPP) is an example of an attempt to create an indigenizing guideline. While it is intended to be used specifically by the Haudenosaunee confederacy, it could be a way to change NAM to include the many perspectives of native peoples (New York State Department of Education 2005). Additionally, the effect which wildlife conservation has on indigenous people is also something that must be considered. One such example is the case of feral pigs in Hawaii. Feral pigs were introduced many years ago to the islands of Hawaii and have been devastating to the ecosystem, as pigs naturally are to almost any ecosystem they are introduced to. Ecologically speaking, eradicating the pigs on the islands would be ideal. However, as Nate Wehr points out, the indigenous people of Hawaii have a cultural bond to the pigs as they hunt them as a game species (Wehr 2022). He suggests that rather than eradicating the pigs completely, the pigs should be eradicated “only in select areas with rare species and in areas that were difficult for pig hunters to access to try and strike a balance between the indigenous and non-indigenous perspectives” (Wehr 2022). This concept of striking a balance between indigenous and non-indigenous perspectives is something that has been sorely lacking in the use of NAM, especially considering one of the tenets is to recognize wildlife as an international resource.

**Point 2: Non-Hunting Recreation**

Another lost perspective in NAM is the perspective of the integration of non-hunting recreation in wildlife conservation. Much of the wildlife conservation done across the United States benefits high priority game species, such as ducks, geese, and deer. While the conservation of ducks, geese, and deer (and the other main game species) are incredibly important, the species which are not hunted and so often not covered by conservation funds are just as important. Most of the funding for wildlife conservation comes from things like duck stamps and ammo taxation, aka from hunters and sport shooters. This often means that the money is spent in ways which focus and benefit on the general values of hunters, and not necessarily on how the money would best be used. This can create situations where certain species which do not interact with or are actively detrimental to game species are under-represented in wildlife policy or are actively attacked through wildlife policy. There is perhaps no better example of this than the gray wolf, a species which once covered the American landscape. Wolves were nearly eradicated from the United States due to the threat they posed to game species and livestock, being hunted indiscriminately for a long time. The endangered species act put a stop to much of the killing of wolves, until they were eventually taken off the list in 2012 once their populations were deemed stable (Smith et al. 2016). Yellowstone National Park has made significant progress in re-establishing wolf populations in the park. Although the hunting of wolves is occasionally allowed in the park (depending on the current status of wolves and desire of the park), it is deemed more important for visitors to be able to view the wolves than hunt them. In other words, the non-consumptive use of wolves holds higher priority than that of consumptive use (Smith et al. 2016). The inclusion and priority of non-consumptive recreators is something that could be a solution to the problem that is game species focused funding. If some wildlife conservation funding came from birdwatchers, for example, then that money could be put into protecting some valuable species of birds which may otherwise go unprotected. Additionally, if some money came from hikers, then funding could go to the restoration of wildlife habitats which can be used by hikers as well as the various species of wildlife that may depend on those habitats. While this idea is inviting, there are some possible issues it can bring up. Nate Wehr describes the point aptly, in that “it's important that we keep outdoor activities accessible to folks from all economic classes” (Wehr 2022). If we went about obtaining funding the same way we do through hunting, but taxing the various recreational materials utilized by non-consumptive recreators, like binoculars and backpacks, it might make the already expensive hobbies even more so. Outdoor recreation is already rather constrictive in its accessibility, and so as Nate says, “a more nuanced approach will be necessary to truly 'solve' this” (Wehr 2022).

**Point 3: Ecological Tunnel Vision**

The last issue with NAM that I wish to discuss is the concept of ecological tunnel vision. With context to NAM, it is when we look at managing species as individuals, and not as a part of a large ecological system. While science may be the underpinning of wildlife conservation policy according to NAM, it isn’t always utilized in the most effective way. Sometimes the lens is a bit too focused, and the broader perspective of the species isn’t taken into account. Sometimes, however, science is used only in a blurry capacity to support political perspectives which actively work against NAM and wildlife populations across the country. This often is in regard to predators, specifically bears and wolves, who are often hunted based not on true hard scientific reasoning, but rather just enough science to constitute legal action, even if that science wouldn’t otherwise hold up under scrutiny. One example is the fact that in Wyoming there are regions which both work to reintroduce beavers into the ecosystem while also allowing the trapping of those very same beavers (Artelle 2019). One reason this may be occurring is a scientific information disconnect between the various levels of government which manage wildlife (Artelle 2019). Additionally, since NAM only dictates that science be the foundation for wildlife policy, there is no quality assurance of the science utilized. While most people have a generally high expectation of scientific research, without specific definitions or considerations, outlined by NAM, it is far too broad and may as well not be present. Perhaps a way to fix this issue is to standardize the standards in which the varying levels of government and their various agencies hold themselves and each other accountable in regards to the scientific basis for wildlife conservation.

**Conclusion**

While NAM has done incredible things for the world of wildlife conservation across the United States, its shortcomings can create some seriously problematic issues. From the continued mistreatment of Indigenous people across North America, to the focus on game species conservation, and finally the ecological tunnel vision and lack of scientific standardization. None of these issues have an easy solution, especially since they require drastic reform to the current way in which wildlife conservation is done throughout the country. It is not hopeless, though, as public knowledge and perspective slowly but surely has evolved to better accommodate the changes that must be made.

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